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BY REV. SAMUEL T. SPEAR,

Pastor of the South Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, N. Y.

THE GRACE OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION.

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

EPHESIANS 4: 29.

MEN are social beings in the very depths of their intellectual and spiritual nature. For their use God has established various media of communication, by which they may apprise each other of their condition, their thoughts, their feelings, and their wants. All mental intercourse among human beings is conducted in this indirect way ; in this way only is one mind enabled to transmit influence to another. The power of *speech* holds a distinguished place in this social arrangement. It is more used, and with less difficulty, than any other instrument of communion among men. The loss of it is an irreparable inconvenience—a vast deduction from the useful, or destructive capabilities of the loser. It is probable, that more good and evil have been accomplished in this world by the simple process of *talking*, than in any other way. Talking is the frequented road of thought—always crowded with ideas, and their dependent influences. The world is alive with the activity of speech.

The text, as you perceive, confines its view to this important faculty ; and, as such, it respects the *use*, which is to be made of this power. It is God's *institute* for the tongue. It is a *precept* imposed on the Ephesian Christians, and equally on all ; restrictive, in that it forbids men to deal in *corrupt* communications—*corrupt*, because they convey unholy influence, whose tendency is not to sanctify, but to do men harm. In distinction from this vice of the tongue, the passage also defines the opposite virtue—"but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."—The goodness of the communication lies in its adaptation to spiritual edification, or profit. That this was the inspired view is shown by the closing phrase—"that it may minister *grace* unto the hearers."

It will be seen at once, that *the grace of religious and spiritual conversation* is the duty inculcated in this passage. The Apostle states the duty in a general form—leaving the questions of time, place, quantity, circumstances, and special theme, to be adjusted by those who should comprehend the principle, and seek to make it practical. It was sufficient for him to urge upon Christians the idea of sanctifying their power of speech, by using it to promote the religion they profess, by conversation about Christ and His kingdom, such conversation as shall most effectually recommend the Saviour to others, and thus “minister grace to the hearers.” These “hearers” may be separate, or several persons together; they may be Christians, or unconverted sinners; at any rate, they are “hearers”—human beings with immortal souls, and within speaking and hearing distance of those who are the children of the Heavenly King.

It would be a great diversion of the text from its true scope, were it limited to the official and public act of preaching the Gospel. It plainly refers to those more familiar interchanges of thought which occur in the *private walks* of life, in the family circle, in the little groups of friendship, or the conferential assemblies of God’s people. It refers to religious communion in a simple, natural, and familiar way. The communion may relate to a statement of hopes, a narration of God’s spiritual dealings with the soul, an exhibition of doctrinal views, the rebuke of fidelity, exhortation to some specific duty, or the voice of solemn warning to the wicked. Whatever be its shape and occasion—things varying with circumstances—the *design* is to do good, to “minister grace unto the hearers,” whether pious or impenitent. An intelligent *spirituality* is the great attribute of religious conversation, essentially connected with the execution of this design. Spirituality, in reference to the speaker, is *piety* of thought, motive, and feeling; in reference to the communication it is such thought as is suited to benefit the soul of man. It is not so much talking *about* religion, as actually *talking* religion; the very communication is freighted with those thoughts, by which God subdues, sanctifies, and saves a sinner. It is the use of thought in reference to that which gives thought its value—*holiness*, to be improved in the Christian, or begun in the impenitent. The materials for this intercourse are furnished in the Sacred Oracles; and hence the practice of the grace supposes our acquaintance with the Book of God. When we talk, as Christians, we talk from, and under the light of the Bible, and communicate to others what this holy book has given to us.

Having thus unfolded the theme of this discourse, I now ask you to reflect on a series of reasons, which may serve to enforce its importance, and by its importance influence our practice. Though a common, it is, nevertheless, one of the most important subjects in the whole range of Christian ethics. The errors of practice here are many and deep seated; and the torpor of con-

science alarming. Let us then endeavor to open our eyes, and come to the light of truth.

I. The Scriptures give us very ample instruction in respect to the proper use to be made of the power of speech.

There are various *vices* of the tongue, which the Bible most sternly condemns. These are censoriousness, railing, tale-bearing, whisperings, backbiting, slander, flattery, lying, blasphemies, evil speakings, filthy communications, even idle talking. In respect to the production of such fruits, the tongue is denominated "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."³ Jehovah has legislated against their existence, and through the lips of the Saviour, taught us, that for every idle word we shall give an account in the day of judgment. As preventive of such evils, we are commanded to put a bridle on the tongue; and if we do not obey, though we may "seem to be religious," still, our "religion is vain." God does not concede to us the right to use the noble power of speech for purposes that are wrong. We cannot innocently transmit an evil passion through this channel; it is God's channel, for He made it. The immorality of the heart becomes doubly malignant, and is sharpened in all its outlines, when the fury of words is lent to its power. Hence the wise Lawgiver has stationed a statute at the heart, condemnatory of the evil feeling—and another at the door of the heart, solemnly interdicting its expression, designating the vice as it rises to the surface, and making it penal not to suppress it in both of its abodes. The man who assumes to himself the right of saying what he pleases, is at war with God; and in due season he will be called into judgment upon this question.

The restrictive precepts of the Scriptures are only a part of the truth; they do not impose an absolute silence as the corrective for an evil tongue. While God restrains in one direction, He as explicitly commands and impels in the other. Having given His precepts and promises to the children of Israel, He subjoins this direction in respect to their use—"Ye shall teach them your children, speaking when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." In this enactment provision is made for a system of oral, familiar, and religious instruction. Obedience to its principle would make every household a school of Christ, soften and chasten the heart, give to the character the best form of spiritual chiseling, which it is in the power of man to bestow. The neglect of Eli to perform the duty of parental religious speaking was a part of the sin that brought upon his offspring the curse of God. The Psalmist speaks of the tongue as his "glory;" and summons it to action in poetic, as well as religious rapture—"Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp; I myself will awake early"—"I will sing and give praise, even with my glory." In the days of Malachi, the mass of the people had turned away from God; some of them, however, had not. This is the record which

the prophet makes of the latter—"Then they that feared the Lord *spake often* one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." They met each other very frequently; and religion was their theme when they met; God approved, took pleasure in their holy conversation, and promised to remember them when He should make up His jewels. If we turn to the New Testament, we find the most ample fullness of preceptive teaching on this subject—"Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man"—"But that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers"—"But *speaking* the truth in love may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ;" not simply *thinking* it, but *speaking* it—"So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." It is made our duty to reprove and warn the wicked; to exhort one another to love and good works; to comfort the disconsolate and afflicted with the words of Christ; to testify to all men in regard to the worth of the Gospel; not to deny, but to speak for Christ. How can we perform one of these duties if we withhold the service of our lips, and omit to adorn our social intercourse with the themes of the Gospel? Their performance is obviously incompatible with silence.

Without a farther deduction of ideas from the Word of God, permit me to press a single question on your thoughts: what are manifestly the spirit and scope of Sacred Scripture in regard to the point before us? Does it not suppose, that the followers of Christ shall talk of Him, much and often, to each other and the wicked, while on their way to glory; *tell* what they know, and ask the world to take the prize bought with a Saviour's blood? Do you believe that the habit of religious taciturnity represents the spirit of the Bible? Is it the tendency of this Book to generate an incommunicative and paralyzed silence? Such a tendency lies neither in the precepts of the Scriptures, nor in their legitimate effects upon the character of man. The whole current of the Bible is strongly in the opposite direction. What then should we be if we were precisely what the Book of God supposes we ought to be? I answer; *communicating* Christians, every one of us; not a *mute* saint would be found on the globe, unless the God of nature had denied to him the power of speech; every mouth would be open, and every tongue on fire with the wisdom and goodness of God. This would disperse the epidemic of silence, and give a healthier air to the Church and the world. We might not all be equally eloquent, or learned, or graceful, or equally wise in the details of religious speech; but we should all have something to say for our Master. The generic diathesis of our spirits would be towards the work of communication, and specific occasions would reveal it. Is not

its absence a sin, whose nature the conscience is to behold, whose existence a purer piety is to annihilate ? Judge ye.

II. Religious conversation is the noblest use to which man can apply the power of speech.

The divine intention in the creation of man is, that he should be a *religious* being—that he should on earth know and observe his Maker's will, and in eternity enjoy His favor for ever. Assuming this as an axiom, then, beyond a question, human endowments in their ultimate scope must be referred to religion for their end and true interpretation. Reason is given to man, that he may discover God's existence, and sufficiently comprehend Him intelligently to worship Him; the susceptibility of affection, that he may love God; the capacity for faith, that he may trust Him; the complex mechanism of a free will, that his acts may have a relation to law, from which a moral character may arise. To these gifts of creation Revelation is added, to shed light where sin had produced darkness; and Christ is offered, that the sinner may see the mode of his return to a forsaken God. Now in an economy of existence, in which religion defines the great end of each existing being, will you tell me for what is bestowed the power of speech ? The evident design is, that by the use of this power the possessor may translate from himself to others whatever he may know, think, and feel as a religious being. This is pre-eminently its design—one of more significance than any other which is conceivable. The soul being made the theatre of light, as is always implied in the supposition of true piety, provision is made that it may socially shed that light by an appropriate collocation of words. Speech is an attribute of man's social nature ; his social nature relates chiefly to the development of religious ends, and rises far above his present convenience as a mere animal ; therefore, speech was given to him primarily for religious use. I can easily imagine that those whose views do no justice to the chief end of our existence, will fail to appreciate this estimate of the speaking faculty ; but, I hope, it will be neither unintelligible nor unprofitable to those who see in religion the true and ultimate interpretation of all else they see or know. Nature is never explained in its final cause, until the exegesis of religion is invoked. Without this it appears as a wilderness of worlds, a vast organism of matter, having no language ; a music of the spheres, without rhythm, accent, or harmony ; a huge and soulless monotone, with no rational cadence. Religion, with its ideas of God and man, drops the robe of light on all material forms, dignifies the universe, forms the grand perspective of being. It is no wonder that those sink into the mire and stay there, whose ideas ascend not to this lofty level ; they understand neither themselves nor their God.

Let us, then, if you please, distinctly state the thought we would endeavor to see. Speech, in the very design of the grant,

is elevated to the religious sphere ; it is a part of the machinery of a world, or rather an universe, to exemplify the power and realize the ends of religion, as it respects both the glory of God and the good of his dependent creatures. Inquiry confined to the physiology of the voice, treating simply of the inflections, cadence, melody, and harmony revealed in the curious mechanism; such inquiry reaches not the true philosophy of speech ; however learned it is on the surface, for the noblest of all the relations of speech is unseen, i. e., its relation to the communication of religious truth. This theatre must open, before we can understand the *moral* rhetoric and elocution of vocal sounds. Religion, the greatest subject with God and the greatest for man, then appears as a passenger in the divinely contrived vehicle, honoring it and honored in it. Earth becomes a bed of telegraphic wires, to hasten the march of the holy guest.

For practical elucidation, behold a Christian in the simplicity and earnestness of love, telling all men, whom he can reach, what he knows of Christ and His kingdom ; giving to others his own ideas and feelings, without losing either. What say you of his employment ? Is he not using the power of speech for the very purpose for which it was chiefly given ? Is not the motive by which he is governed the very noblest than can influence man ? Is there anything upon the field of motive richer than a predominating desire to make known the religion of the Bible ? any thing better for conversation than God and His Gospel ? Can you conceive of a higher moral state on earth than is found in that man whose heart is so religiously laden, that he *must* utter his thoughts, to whom it is a privilege to tell what a precious Saviour he has found, and invite all others to "come and see ?" Would you have him hold the treasure in silent possession and social exclusion ? Look at the *theme* which animates and fires his tongue, and is poured out in the words he utters. How sacred those words—how sublime that language, which holds such a polished gem ! See also the point whence his ideas take their departure—his own soul. See where they go—to the soul of another. His reason and affections have taken hold of God and the Gospel ; and now, by the use of speech, he is seeking to make these objects known. Let him proceed, whether in the Christian pulpit, the prayer-meeting, the private parlor, on board the steam-boat, in the rail car, or by the way-side ; let him *talk*, when he has such glorious things of which to speak. Speech was never better used ; articulated sounds never vibrated upon a higher errand. Speech, in this case, is reason on its mission of blessing. What better thing can reason do, than to talk with men about God and eternity ? How much better this than the *worthless* words with which so much of life is wasted ! It will appear better on high than the purest secular eloquence that ever stirred a nation's passion, or soothed its fears. When the *eclat* of senate chambers shall be forgotten and thrown among the ruins of by-

gone worlds, then the religious use of speech shall be preserved in the archives of immortality ; and, in its good effects, remain, as a bright memorial of tongues that have mouldered into dust. Let us feel the sublime dignity of this power, and use it for God while we may.

III. The religious use of speech is what may be justly expected of every Christian person.

It is a fact, and every Christian professes to admit it, that he is under obligation to do his utmost to make all men truly religious, to enrich them with "the unsearchable riches of Christ." This is the minimum of his promise to Christ, and of his covenant with the friends of Christ. What should we infer from such a fact and its admission ? That he would pass through life vastly more distinguished for his silence than his utterance ? That he would ingraft upon such a thought a profound and uniform taciturnity, as its proper, or admissible consequence ? Then, alas ! logical gravity has turned the other way. What have you ? An obligation of weightiest import existing—fully admitted, even, it may be, to a neuralgia of the conscience ; and that omitted which is a most important method of meeting the great demand ! Who can make harmony among such incongruities ? Who can consent to be the strange paradox in which they dwell ? Who can turn such a crooked line into a straight one ?

Again, every Christian professes to have in his own experience the most precious treasures of thought ; to be more deeply interested in Christ, and the things of His kingdom, than in all other things put together. Surely a man does not claim to be a Christian upon a *less* profession than this. Now when you have so much devotion of feeling, such warm affections, such wonderful ideas, what do you expect ? Should you suppose, or should you not, that this state of things would ever be heard of through the organs of speech ? Is it characteristic of man to be silent, or communicative about that which supremely engages him ? We have the Saviour's authority for saying, that "out of the *abundance* of the heart the mouth speaketh." Our own observation, also, must have taught us that the remark is true. Men who are intensely devoted to the accumulation of wealth, are incessantly talking upon the subject ; it is their principal theme ; their reading, reflections, inquiries, and remarks, naturally run in this direction. You find a warm and enthusiastic politician, and you will see a man whose conversation is distinctly marked by the state of his heart. The amateur of elegant literature, the connoisseur of the fine arts, the devotee of amusement, the mechanic in his workshop, the maniac in his cell, even the boy with his kite and top ; all have tongues, and by their use reveal the predominating perceptions and feelings of their minds. Not more truly is gravitation a law, than is sympathy between the state of the soul and the organs of speech. Judging human nature, therefore, by its known laws, should we infer that

Christians would be conversational as such, or profoundly silent ? If they be silent, it is clearly an exception to a general principle of humanity ; and, as it is contrary to our expectation from the nature of the case, we demand for it a special reason. What shall this reason be ? A little time spent in reconnoitering this ground may not be labor lost.

It cannot be said with truth, that the themes of the Gospel are such as to admit of no conversational use ; or that they are of no spiritual service when thus used. It *ought* not to be said, that Christian conversation tramples upon the proprieties of refined social etiquette. The man who thus feels would do well to take some lessons in "the etiquette of heaven." An etiquette that studiously shuts out the wisdom of God, is not such as a child of grace ought to respect ; it is Satan's fashion to ruin souls. Let us suppose the reason for which we are in quest, to be, that the Christian habitually feels *little or no disposition* to speak of the things of Christ ; that his tongue labors and soon grows weary in attempting to carry the theme ; and, therefore, he does not speak. Retaining the supposition, that he is a Christian, what he professes to be, you then have the following case : his heart is supremely devoted to the Saviour ; the religion of the Bible has the chief place in his thoughts ; and yet he is uniformly disposed to be silent upon the greatest theme of his own soul ; that is, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" *not*. Who can make these things cohere ? To state such a case is to reveal its fallacy. Suppose again the reason to be, that the Christian has nothing to say, no ideas, experiences, or hopes to communicate. This being the reason, then the religion of the blessed Saviour does not so dwell in his mind that he can make it a theme of conversation. He is not familiar with the subject ; and his want of familiarity is so great, that, when he undertakes to express ideas which he supposed he had, he discovers, either that he has no such ideas, or that they are so exceedingly obscure that he cannot tell what they are, and dare not trust them in the form of words. What a state of Christian knowledge is this ! Who has a right in this land of Bibles, Sabbaths, pulpits, and instructive institutions, to pass through a whole pilgrimage, knowing as little about Christianity, as the confession adverted to implies ? All the interests of his being are professedly committed to it : committed to *what* ? He says, he cannot tell you what ; the nearest he can come to it is, that it is *something*. How can his heart make progress in spirituality ; how can he hope with clearness, believe with power, love with strength ; I had almost said, how can he be a Christian ? A Christian, whose knowledge is such that he can never command it for social use, presents a most horrible poverty of intellect ; it is both his sin and his loss ; and he should seek a better state, even if it cost him the pain of martyrdom to do it. It is appalling to think, that a child of grace, an heir of heaven, should be willing to live in such a

mental condition. Such a reason for silence, upon due reflection, is enough to make the soul shudder ; it is even *worse* than the silence itself. You may be assured, that nearly all the truth which powerfully impresses you, you can convey to some extent. That which evaporates when subjected to the accuracy of a verbal statement, was a mental vapor, and not a perception of much power upon your own heart. It may again be supposed, that the Christian pleads his *constitutional diffidence* ; that he has not an easy command of words ; that he cannot communicate his ideas on any subject with the freedom and fluency of some others. Admitting the fact to be as stated, then it is pertinent to ask the brother this question : whether he permits diffidence, this alleged want of tact in the use of words, to keep him in a state of uniform silence on *other* subjects ; and if not, why on the subject of religion ? He is a merchant. You enter his store for the purposes of trade ; and at once perceive that his words do not flow as rapidly as those of many other men. The question is : does he yield to his diffidence, or do the best he can ; state his prices and offer all honorable inducements for you to buy ? The uniform practice of even the most diffident of men is too well known to need any description. Why should they not treat the things of Christ in the same way ; make the best social use of religion that lies within the compass of their powers ? If others, with better gifts and fewer impediments, can excel them in this particular, what is that to them ? It need excite neither their pride, nor their envy ; let each use his own gifts and be content. How, again, will the diffident man ever overcome his felt embarrassment, and make the religious use of speech comparatively an easy work ? By *doing* the very thing which he feels diffident in attempting to do. There is no other way to gain the victory. Shall he then yield to his diffidence, sink down into the settled habit of silence, and thus greatly decrease his usefulness ; or shall he conquer it, and enlarge his usefulness ? I suppose no Christian, however diffident, has a spiritual right to dodge this question ; he is bound to have a conscience, and let it act upon the point. There are, also, many other questions he would do well to answer, i. e., What is the precise *quantity* of diffidence, which is a lawful plea for silence ? What is the amount of talent, as compared with others, at which a man may venture to speak for Christ ? Why is it that when the heart is warmed this diffidence is sometimes overcome ? Why is it that some of our most intelligent Christians, even learned men, are diffident here, but not so anywhere else ? Why is it that some can speak very fluently in a business meeting of the Church about questions of finance, and yet so strangely lose the power of speech in a religious and devotional meeting of God's people ?

I will not detain you to explore this list of reasons to greater length. The general muteness of so many of Christ's disciples is truly a great evil—a vast loss of power in converting the

world. As we think of the loss, we cannot feel much disposed to encourage its cause, or look very favorably upon reasons urged in defence of that cause. In opposition to all these reasons it still remains true, that we may justly expect of a Christian man a great amount of spiritual conversation, as he passes through the eventful scenes of life. By his profession he has such treasures of thought, such affections of heart, as we should suppose it would be difficult for him to conceal; indeed, we should infer, that he would have no *disposition* to make the concealment. Until human nature shall be radically changed, it is fair to infer a Christianity eminently *social* from one that is purely and eminently *spiritual*. There are no processes of reasoning which can set aside this inference, without involving some dangerous fallacy. Who shall make the religion of the blessed Saviour thus social? Those who have it. How? by silence, or by speech?

The strength of the inference from the obligation and professions of every saint is also very much increased when we add the fact, that he has in his possession what many others are rejecting, and for which rejection are in danger of losing their souls. The storm, which is rising over them, is prophetic of a fearful doom. He, the Christian, sees it; his benevolence is supposed to yearn with interest as he looks; he sees the appointed method of escape; has embraced it himself. Now, what think you of such a man in such premises? Is it probable, or not, that he will warn the wicked, entreat them to be reconciled to God through Christ? Can it be that he will pass them in total silence, and mingle with them from day to day, not even whispering to them the note of danger, or telling them of Christ and his power to save? Think you, that this Christian will ever go to the home of an unconverted sinner for the specific purpose of preaching the Gospel to him? As he meets him by the way-side, will he ever talk to him about immortality and his great interests therein? Will he urge him to improve the brief sojourn of life for happiness and heaven? Suppose that he should do this, that *every* Christian were thus to act; would it not be in accordance with what may be fairly expected? Suppose that he does *not* do so, that he never seriously and spiritually conversed with an unconverted sinner in all his life-time, or that it is his general habit to pass this class of persons silent about their souls; then you have a case of which it is extremely painful to think. Is religion with him a *fable*? Then let him be honest, and say so; but if not, let him not *act* as if it were a fable. In the name of Christ we claim that his life should not be such a practical denial of his own professions. Sinners, who need his influence, may press him with the same claim.

IV. The life of the Christian is attended with numerous occasions which imperatively summon him to the religious use of speech.

By the very terms of his existence the disciple of Christ is

thrown into the bosom of human society. Here he spends his days, forms his character, exerts his influence, and prepares for heaven. Being thus closely impacted with others, he is, of necessity, not only receiving, but also extending social contacts in all directions—when he thinks of it, and when he does *not* think of it. He cannot, if he would, and he should not, if he could, repeal this great law, which presides over his earthly existence. Under its operation, in the course of even a very short life, he is brought a great many thousand times into social proximity to those, who are traveling with him to the bar of God. With some he is especially *intimate*. They are members of his own family—his “kindred according to the flesh;” or they are his associates in business, his patrons in commerce; or by the affinities of friendship they are affectionately allied to him. He sees them often—as often speaks to them; indeed, a large part of his life passes away in the circle which he and they mutually form. Again, he has Christian associations; he meets his fellow heirs on the Sabbath, in the prayer-meeting, by the way-side; he, more or less, meets them wherever he goes. He is sometimes in contact with those who know more, and at others with those who know less than himself. He has to do with men in almost every variety of mental condition. The thoughtless and careless, who trifle with God and His truth—the gay and giddy butterflies of the passing hour—the anxious, on whose souls eternal things have made their awful impress—the young, buoyant with the elasticity of life’s opening morning—the aged, seared and withered by the lapse of years—the afflicted, with their sensibilities set to the key of tenderness, and symphonious with the counsels and consolations of the Gospel—the sick and dying, on the brink of immortality, and soon to be ushered into the midst of eternal scenes; *all* these persons lie across his path; he passes by them on his way to glory, and so near them that he cannot help seeing them. They are entirely within his reach, and supply an occasion for him to do an important duty. Such occasions are distributed along his journey from day to day. As they do not come in masses, so they cannot be met and improved in masses. The humble and Christ-like mode of doing good in *detail* is the only one, that corresponds with the appointed circumstances of human existence.

Let us now suppose, that the general habit of this Christian is to be religiously silent; that he marches round the whole circle of his social relationships spiritually dumb as a marble statue; that he never introduces the themes of his Saviour anywhere; that he is even reluctant to engage in Christian conversation, and if it be forced upon him, quite willing to let it drop; that he does not warn the wicked, or speak to his brethren with any freedom, interest, or relish of soul; that even in his own family his voice is seldom heard uttering words for Christ. Is this man fulfilling the mission, created by the social premises of his existence? I cannot make

myself think that he is. I have heard all his excuses ; and they seem lighter than a feather, when compared with the argument, which proceeds from the social facts of his present being. These facts are so many *alarm-bells*, rung by the hand that made the universe ; and their language is as intelligible as Jehovah's voice, when he spake on Mount Sinai. Why should not this Christian give to Christ and to society, at every appropriate angle of contact, the sacred use of speech ? Can he tell why ? Let him be careful, that he does not defend his silence by an argument, that would make him dumb amid Cherubim and Seraphim on high. Has God lighted within his soul the lamp of immortal love—enriched his understanding with the pure jewels of Gospel thought ; and shall he extinguish the holy blaze, and wrap in sepulchral gloom the best treasure of his mind ? Shall he do this, when society without him cries for an open mouth and a Christian speech ? To whom would he commend his own example ? Not to his minister—not to any Christian on the globe. He is practically an exception to an argument, whose general excellence he acknowledges—but from whose controlling power he makes his escape in the use of reasons, which even he will condemn when left alone to his own reflections. In what way he will reply to the recriminations of the lost, by him unwarned, it exceeds all human ingenuity to guess. That any Christian should be in contact with such an amount of *possible* good, and yet do so little, is appalling. How can it be ? How can we consent to make such a case our own, when we must so soon meet Him, who will make inquisition for blood ? Let us remember, that “to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Let us not incur a mountain of guilt by the negations of our Christian life.

V. The religious use of speech is an essential element in giving to the world a Christian example.

It is familiar to you all, that in the Scriptures the disciples of Christ are regarded as *examples*—living specimens of the power of the Gospel. What is it to be an example ? It is to set forth, illustrate, and unfold something, so that others may see it. In the very nature of things an example cannot be negative or latent : it must be a positive disclosure, sufficiently so to cross the abyss between solitude and society, and meet the intelligence of others. If it be less than this, it is not an example, any more than a grain of dust at the bottom of the ocean. Again, what is the thing to be set forth by a *Christian example* ? It is its province to represent to the intelligence of others the religion of Christ, not only as a system of doctrines, but also in its delightful and saving effects upon the heart of him who gives the example. In it you have the procession of eternal wisdom through a sanctified soul to another, whether sanctified or not—the radiation of borrowed light. He, who gives such an example, becomes a *medium* of vision to, and impression upon, other minds. The spiritual phases of his own soul are uncovered, turned outwards, and lie on

the plane of a social visibility. He presents the illuminated disk of his own heart in every position of the moral orbit, showing the image of Christ for travellers to the world immortal to look and to read.

We come then to the more specific question : By what *method* shall a Christian make such a disclosure—realize such a representation—give an example becoming to his profession ? It is very common to reply that he must do so by the general *manner* and *course* of his life. I do not object to this answer ; but will simply ask for its explanation. What does it mean ? Does it mean, that he is not to be guilty of gross immoralities ? A great many sinners are not thus guilty ; and do they give a Christian example ? Is this negation the full altitude of the conception ? Does it mean, that he goes to church, outwardly keeps the Sabbath, abstains from profanity, gives his money for religious uses, is a quiet, honest, and respectable man ? All these things are true of many in the ranks of impenitence. Does it mean, that in private he reads the Bible, lifts up his voice to God in prayer, and cherishes devout meditations in the solitude of his own heart ? If so, then what he does in private, is no example to others, since it is unknown to them. The hearer will please to observe, that I do not object to a single one of the above specifications : I am glad, that the man whom he is picturing, is as good as the description implies. The things, I admit, bear an essential relation to the supposition of a Christian example. My difficulty lies just at this point : This good man has the powers of speech ; in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, in all ordinary concerns, it is by the *use* of these powers that he unfolds the contents of his soul, unless silence be prompted by some sinister or selfish motive ; indeed, the very *character* which he has among his fellow men, depends largely upon the use he has made of his tongue ; and in these circumstances, I find it difficult to complete the conception of a Christian example in the manner and course of a man's life, unless religious and spiritual conversation be a *part* of that manner. You seal up his lips for any reason, and the sun of his Christian character is more than half eclipsed ; it is but the small segment of a circle, which you can then see. The supposition blockades the principal channel through which his thoughts and affections most readily, naturally, and powerfully flow. He is at once, more than *half dead*, so far as the circle is concerned in which he may move. Whatever else he may do or omit, his uniform silence will be an immense deduction from his Christian example. It belongs to this example, is integral in the very idea, that he should frequently and freely speak to others of Christ and his cause. How shall Christ dwelling in him as “the hope of glory,” or his word abiding in him “richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ;” how shall they go forth, unless he throw open the doors of the soul ? The moment he puts a chain upon his tongue, he sinks his power to a lower level ; and if he has al-

ways chained it, then he has never made such an exhibition of Christianity, as it was, and now is his privilege and duty to make. Be it remembered, that the simple reputation of being a Christian by having joined the church, together with the absence of any imputations necessarily assailing this reputation, is but a *small* part of that pious and powerful testimony for the Saviour, which a good man may render, if he will. Can it be less than his duty, to adorn and sanctify his conversation with the themes of the Gospel ;—to act as if they were congenital with the piety of his heart ? Will not this give his example the brightest lustre, and place his own piety in the most palpable form for transmission and impression ? He may be wise in using the sacred treasure ; but let him never be wise in *not* using it.

VI. Finally, the *benefits* which are to accrue from religious and spiritual conversation, most powerfully enforce the duty.

Suppose, that in these religious interviews, the parties are Christians ; and that they unite in a free and affectionate interchange of thought for mutual improvement in knowledge and grace. Suppose it to be a general *habit* among the followers of Christ, to speak “often to one another,” as was the case with those who feared the Lord in the days of Malachi. What are to be the good effects upon them, as resulting from such a course ? Does not every hearer believe, that they will be much profited ;—that their social interviews will become—what they often are not—valuable means of spiritual culture ? I have not time for much detail on this point ; and yet, you will indulge me sufficiently to hear two or three remarks.

This habit would greatly promote the *fraternal* spirit among Christians. Their religious intimacy would generate a feeling of nearness, and strengthen the tie of Christian union. They would seem to each other less like strangers, and more like familiar and cherished friends. Their intercourse would develope the charms of a mutual sympathy ;—make it difficult for the seeds of discord to grow in such a soil. It is well known, that the suspension of intercourse fosters indifference, and sometimes alienation of feeling. The warmest affections will lose their freshness, unless they be frequently renewed. We know of no process for the renewal, except by the agreeable and pleasant contact of the beings between whom they exist. You never spent an hour in conversation with a Christian brother, which at the time interested your mind, and drew out your feelings, without being conscious of a new and warm attachment towards him. If you had some little prejudice against him, some foolish pique of soul, it subsided ; took its leave of absence without your notice. Why then, should not the disciples of the common Saviour develope the fraternal spirit by this cheap and heavenly mode ? That this spirit is of immense consequence to their peace, happiness, good character, and social usefulness ; worthy of cultivation by a process so easy, simple, and sure, that it greatly diminishes the chances for the existence of

those evils that so often derange the harmony of Christians ; these truths, surely, are too obvious to need a word of argument. A vast proportion of the unhappy feelings, the petty discords, or the more terrible convulsions which have agitated the Church of Christ, would have been prevented, had its members been more accustomed to take sweet counsel together, and cemented their hearts in the unity of “ one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

Again, this sanctified conversation has a powerful tendency to improve and enlarge the understanding. It awakens reflection ; starts the mind out into new trains of thought, which maybe of invaluable service in the future lives of the parties. Two minds, when acting together, necessarily sharpen the contemplative powers ; they are throwing out hints, posting here and there on each other’s path little sentinels of thought, and breaking up the dry and stagnant dullness of mental indolence. There are very few minds, that will work with a sufficient amount of intensity to accomplish much in the region of thought, without an occasional stimulus from others ; and even the most powerful need social friction to bring out their energies. Then, again, things do not always lie in the same shape in all minds ; there is diversity in the points of mental prospect. By conversation these diversities are made the common property of all who participate therein—each having the opportunity to modify, confirm, or correct his own reflections in the light of others. Such a habit would give Christian intercourse a new character, and clothe it with new power. I verily believe it to be one serious fault with the interviews of Christians, that they are not made religiously *instructive*. They are not generally expected to be such—not sought with any such view ; there is very little in them to produce any evolution of the intelligence ; they impart no vigor to the reflective powers. The consequence is that Christians gain very little in the way of religious knowledge by their conversation. How widely different the fact would be, were they spiritually inquisitive, anxious to learn, strongly disposed to breathe an atmosphere religiously intellectual ! What great benefits they would be conferring and receiving ! Then, Christian intelligence would not be so much wrapt in clouds—dodging amid ambiguities, and stale, as if it had not been stirred for half a century. I do not know, that it is possible in this strange world largely and extensively to realize this idea ; but this I know, that, were it done, the Church would reap an immense benefit therefrom. I should be quite willing, that you should all try it ; and then judge of the advantages in the light of your own experience.

Again, this sanctified conversation would make the things of religion vastly more *precious* in the enjoyments of the soul. Christianity must make its subject happy and cheerful in its services ; or it does not begin to attain its power over his heart. He must relish the things of true piety ; or it will be a *purgatory* to his mind. Now who does not know, that this relish, this heavenly

aptitude of soul, may be cultivated to almost any extent ? It may be made a very delicate and most delightful frame of the spiritual man. Its culture is a very interesting part of the Christian's labor with his own heart. In this work he will derive very material help from spiritual conversation. The themes which engage his tongue, will also engage his understanding ; and through the latter will be gently modifying the state of his heart. Their impression will be *left* on the heart ; and before it wears away, it will be renewed by the same process ; and in this way the mind will, quietly, but effectually, assume a heavenly *habitude* of sensibility, which has permanency and power. The necessity, that the Christian, in making this attainment, should exercise himself unto the grace of spiritual conversation, grows out of this fact ; that if he does not, the reasons therefor will be very likely to be reasons for the want of any proper action of his understanding ; without which action religion can never fold itself in the emotions and delights of his heart. Is it not a fact that, when a good man is warmed with sacred and holy feelings, it is done through the medium of his understanding ? How else can it be accomplished ? Is it not also a fact, that pious and spiritual interviews with others have a tendency to enthrone the things of Christ in the understanding, and keep them there ? In all ordinary cases whatever acts inimically to these interviews, goes farther ; sweeps over the whole man. Here is a professed friend of Christ, who has little or no relish for spiritual conversation. Bring up its appropriate themes ; see how silent he is—how monosyllabic his speech has become. Change the subject ; and his tongue begins to move, ready to take its full quantum of service. Now does that man relish spiritual *reflection* any better ? I do not believe that he does ; and if he does not, it is idle to suppose, that the things of Christ are truly precious in the enjoyments of his soul. If he be a Christian, let him begin to think, and to read, and to pray, and to speak ; let him keep up the process, until power divine shall mould his heart into a more genial and heavenly frame. He may have to undergo the pangs of a moral crucifixion ; but if faithful, the sun will shine at last.

These then are some of the benefits of religious conversation, when Christians simply are the parties engaged. What a field is opened for this grace, when we slightly change the supposition ; and bring an impenitent world under the influence of the Church, in the full exercise of this power ! Behold the followers of the Lamb, in the deep and irrepressible earnestness of love, commanding the Gospel to the unconverted ; the parent entreating his child—the child, the parent—the husband, his wife, and the wife, her husband—the friend counselling his friend—Christians making the walks of social life blaze with the appeals of truth ! How many souls in this way have been turned from nature's darkness into God's marvellous light ! What a precious sentence was that, which fell from your lips, and was owned as the means of salvation to him, who perhaps would have perished without it ! How

much good has been accomplished in this way! How much more might be! And shall not the amazing benefit awaken us to the exercise of religious speech? Our contact with the impenitent is a practical quietus to their minds, and our silence the theme of their surprise, unless we break the seal and beseech them to be reconciled to God. They reason correctly when they infer, that if we felt much, we should talk with them; insecurely, when they judge, that because we do not seem to feel much concerned for their welfare, therefore they are safe. Let us take away this refuge from their hearts; let the benefit to be gained be a sufficient reason why we should do our duty to them by kind and constant entreaty. Why should not every Christian, in his sphere, be another Harlan Page, and bestow his starry crown with gems redeemed? Are we not more silent than we shall wish to have been, when assembled millions meet for their last account?

In bringing these remarks to a close permit me to say, that a proper consideration of this subject must make every Christian feel, that he is not doing his duty to himself, or to others, and above all to his Saviour, who omits to use his means of grace. It is mournful to think of the power, which is buried and lost in consequence of the omission. Talents, that might by use be burnished and made to shine, are left to rust in the solitude of their own quiescence. Multitudes find their way into the Church, and there live and die—use up a whole probation; yet you hear little or nothing from them, in any place or time, about the great things which by profession are made the objects of their thought and hope. The intellectual faculties, instead of being employed to show the worth and merit of the bleeding Lamb, are chartered to find reasons for silence; and a curious collection indeed these reasons make, when all assembled into one common receptacle. They serve, however, as a sort of logical *fort*, within which an immense army of Christian *mutes* is encamped—so safely walled in that the hardest cannonading seldom reaches them. The loss, which this dispensation of silence induces, is a thought, that well deserves our deepest regret; and if anything can be done to avert the evil, the effort is worthy the preacher's tongue and the Christian's prayer. You may be sure that it is an evil which ought to be corrected. Very *useful* Christians are communicative. And is it no evil not to be useful? Whatever makes the child of God *spiritual*, disposes him to holy speech. The scenes of a revival, the hour of affliction and the bed of death wake his tongue, and bring it into action. It is wise to begin this work in the beginning of piety. But if you did not do so, then it is wise to begin it now. Let me ask you, my brethren, to give all these thoughts free access to your conscience. Do not turn them away as an idle tale. I believe they deserve, as I trust they will receive at your hands, a better treatment.

SERMON CCCCLXXIII.

BY REV. JAMES M. SHERWOOD.

CHRIST A SYMPATHIZING FRIEND AND SAVIOUR.

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." **HEBREWS 4:15.**

WHO needs not a friend? Whose heart has not breathed the inward sigh for the ear, and bosom, and arm of sympathy? The heart of man, blighted in its primeval hopes and joys, burdened with guilt and fear, pining in sorrow and want, and struggling to rise above the darkness and misery of the present, and apprehend and realize the glory and blessedness of the future,—how much it needs, and longs after, the contact and aid of a true, and powerful friendship. We have, in CHRIST, a FRIEND of profound sympathy, and infinite love, whose great heart is stirred to its very depths on our account, and whose mighty arm is reached out to befriend and to save us. At an immense sacrifice He has qualified Himself for the offices of a Friend, and now proffers His services to us in this interesting and attractive character.

I. In order to be a sympathizing friend, *one must condescend to our estate, and put his being in actual and living contact with our being.* While he remains without the circle of our personal ties, relations, and interests; while an immense distance intervenes, and thought, and feeling, and experience, are not brought into a free and living fellowship; there can be but little genuine and effective sympathy; there will be wanting that intimate knowledge of each other's being, that mutual and intelligent confidence, and that assimilation of mind and character, which constitute both the condition and bond of true friendship. If you would be my bosom friend, and warm me with your sympathy, and gain over me the power to influence and enrich my existence, you must come down from your elevation, and be my companion in the low and rugged paths I tread—humble yourself to the feeling and service of a brother; put your heart in contact with mine, till it shall throb with the like emotions, and consent to share in the joys and sorrows of my being.

The Son of God has acted in this wise. He stooped from Heaven to embrace us; exchanged the throne for the cross; the

glory of the Godhead for the weakness of humanity. He put Himself in direct contact, and intimate relationship with us ; on a footing of equality in a common nature and a common interest ; bound Himself to His people in near and perpetual ties, and made them one with Him. Amazing condescension ! "Mystery of godliness !" Divinity itself brought down to a level with fallen humanity ; embodied in human form ; possessing a human heart, and a human character ; so that with our eyes we "behold His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." In the son of Mary we have the God incarnate ; in "the man of sorrows," in the sufferer of Calvary we are brought into direct contact with the active sympathy and the abounding mercy of Heaven towards sinners. He has thus made Himself our *Brother*, in nature and feeling, in service and inheritance. We have in Him a perfect Friend. His powerful sympathies are enlisted in our cause. He has humbled himself from the heights of heaven to the depths of our fallen world, that He might bind us to His heart, and thrill our being with His love, and purify and glorify it by His grace.

What *honor*, too, is put upon human nature by the second Adam ! He has clothed it with peculiar interest and lustre, by adopting it, and glorifying it in His person and office-work, as our Redeemer. He presents, also, to the world, in His manhood, a perfect pattern of human excellence, for our study and imitation.

II. We expect in a friend, *those elements and exercises which lead to conformity, and constitute a bond of union.* There can be no real effective sympathy where there is no assimilation of spirit, thought, and experience. The greater the degree of *oneness*, in all the mental and moral states, and habits, and aims of a plurality of persons, the stronger is that mysterious tie, which binds their being and destiny together. Like both attracts and begets like. There is a spontaneous flowing together, of hearts pervaded by the same sentiments, beating with the like emotions, and walking in the same paths of actual being. Who has most of your heart's confidence, and is most longed for, and leaned upon, when the services of a friend are needed ? That friend, assuredly, whose being mirrors best your own likeness, and in whose experience you can best read the tale of your own joys and sorrows ; he is your friend in a peculiar sense, and can comfort and serve you, when the sympathy, and kind offices of all the world beside, are unavailing.

The Son of man has not only taken to Himself our nature, but the whole burden of our "infirmities." He has both condescended to our own estate, and actually walked the like dark, and rugged, and suffering ways of being. He has put Himself in a position that commands a perfect view, and comprehension of the entire field, of our existence; and He, Himself, has made the circuit of that field, weeping over its moral wastes, affected by all

its objects of interest, threading all its lonely and weary paths, and participating in all the states and exercises of our fallen being. His soul was alive to the beauties of nature, and of being around Him ; to the lessons of Providence, and the claims of want, and grief, and affection. He ever honored the relations of life ; cherished natural affection ; sanctified labor by the sweat of His own brow ; honored the domestic relations ; observed the innocent laws and customs of society, and mingled freely in the living scenes of the world. He felt the evils of sin—the bitterness of inward conflicts, and outward sufferings—the joys and griefs of friendship—the ills of life, and the pangs of death, just as other men feel them. He had the affections and infirmities, the wants and sensibilities, of a man. How the stupidity and unbelief of His disciples, the treachery of His friends, and the injuries of His enemies, tried His patience ! How was His soul moved to pity and to prayer, for a lost world ! With what an anxious heart did He prosecute the labors of each day ! How man's guilt and misery weighed down His spirits, and taxed His energies to the farthest point of endurance ! Behold how He “endures the contradiction of sinners.” How profound His grief at the grave of Lazarus. See Him weep on the Mount of Olives, as He approaches the scene of final suffering—for the last time, and with a bursting heart, spreads out His arms over Jerusalem !

What personal conflicts did He endure ! The wilderness, the solitary place, and the Mount of Olives, were often the scenes of exercises, affecting and sublime ; manhood sinking under the weight of a world's guilt and grief, wrestling in prayer, groaning in spirit, and working out in solitary greatness, a mighty redemption, for the brethren of His adoption. Gethsemane heard the earnest burdened pleadings of human infirmity, in that moaning voice which broke on the midnight-hour, and thrilled the hearts of attending angels—“O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me !” “The hour,” in which Jesus bowed under the weight of His sorrows in the garden, and embraced the earth in the intensity of His anguish, was a fearful approach to *infinity* of suffering. And on the cross, humanity bled and died. His was the death of a man keenly alive to the evil of suffering, and to the atrocious indignity offered Him—a death of excruciating agony and profound affliction.—In the crowd that gathered to His cross, He recognised His weeping *mother*, and kindly commended her to “the beloved disciple.” Filial love, and grief, lived in that noble heart, till it ceased to beat. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?” From the profoundest depth of creature weakness and distress, came forth that expiring cry.

There is no relation or circumstance in life, therefore, no joy or sorrow, anxiety or conflict, in which Jesus is not fully qualified to sympathize with us. He became a *man* in every thought

and feeling, and condition, sin excepted, that He might enter fully into our case, and challenge our gratitude and confidence.

III. A *perfect knowledge of us*, is essential to the character of a perfect friend. Ignorance of our case, or mere imperfection of judgment, may convert the well-meant service of a friend into actual and irreparable injury. Job's friends, ignorant of his real feelings and misjudging Providence, proved miserable comforters to the smitten patriarch. Severe and trying as were the strokes of the Almighty, they were yet more tolerable to his burdened and anguished heart, than were the rash judgments and labored speeches, of those who came to condole with him in his affliction. And who has not been grieved and wronged by the false judgment, or ill-timed service of his friends? A word of praise or censure, misapplied; advice, well-meant but evil; a service rendered, kind in spirit but unwise in fact; reproof or correction withheld from a mistaken regard; what have we not suffered in this way, in our physical, mental, and moral being—and at the hand of our best *friends!* This fact lessens greatly the value of all human friendship. So *imperfect* is human character, at best, that it is safe to rely but little upon our friends, however wise, or kind, or able to serve. Indeed, I doubt not, that we are, in general, greater sufferers from the faults, omissions, and imperfections of our friends, than from the malice of our enemies. Alas! how many lives are sacrificed and characters spoiled, and hopes blasted, and souls ruined, from the mere *imperfection and frailty of human kindness.*

It is a relief to turn from the weakness of man, to the power of God, from the failings and errors of the fallen creature, to the perfection and transcendent ability of our Immanuel. He has a perfect knowledge of all things and a perfect judgment, so that He cannot err in His estimate of our wants and the means of relief, nor in a single item in the whole series of His agencies and providential dispensations. He has a perfect comprehension of our being, in all its laws, and in the entire range of its experience. He knows every want of the creature and the fullness of the Creator—the source of every evil and every remedy in the range of omniscience. For, as God, He made us, and gave laws to our being, and to the constitution of the universe, while, as man, He has experienced our infirmities, and has, therefore, a perfect knowledge of our case. He knows all our sins, secret and open, and the circumstances attending their commission. He knows all our secret sorrows, which we bury in the depths of our hearts. He knows the weight of our cares—the intensity of our mental conflicts with doubt, and fear, and error—and the darkness and misery we suffer in our souls, from the hidings of God's face, and the various trials and besetments of life. He knows full well, the extent of our ruin as sinners; the utter perversity of our hearts; the height and depth of that wrath which we have provoked, and the all but infinite difficulty in the way of our re-

demption. He knows, too, the strength and fullness of God's love and grace, and the reality and greatness of the salvation which is offered to man in the Gospel. He knows, also, when to pity and when to censure, when to bless and when to chastise—the time, place, and manner of every office of friendship. O! what a friend must He be! Who, beside, could have made so kind and needful a provision for our spiritual nature, as His Gospel reveals? Who could have devised a wiser or better system of means than He is using to recover sinners to God? Who but the Incarnate One, could bind on Himself the burden of a sinner's guilt and doom, and, travailing in the greatness of His strength, stay the descending arm of Almighty wrath and pluck him from under the curse of the law, by giving an adequate ransom, and then renew him from sin into holiness, and pervade his dark and miserable being with the light, and peace, and joy of celestial life? Oh! who can plead for the penitent sinner like unto our conquering Jesus? Burdened with the service undertaken for us—"touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and knowing the sufficiency of His sufferings, what importunity of manner, and intensity of pity, and holy joy of benevolence, and efficacy of power, must characterize His intercessions at the mercy seat! Is not the *Christian* safe in such hands—with the arms of the sympathizing and mighty Jesus for his support? And will the *sinner*, whose guilt is so enormous, and whose tremendous doom of judgment and despair is hastening on, spurn the only Saviour that can deliver him—the proffered service of the only Friend whose kindness is of any avail?

IV. To be qualified to sympathize fully with another in distress, we must have undergone, in our own person, the same evils which he endures. In the time of sickness, there is no friend whose sympathy and kind offices are so grateful, as are those of that particular one whose feelings have been mellowed by a like affliction; who is no stranger to a sick room and a bed of pain; whose voice is gentle, and step light, and look kind, and hand practised in the service. And in the day of affliction, when the heart bleeds, and the soul is in heaviness; or in the season of spiritual darkness, when faith is dim and hope is weak, and the conflict severe, and the desponding soul treads on the verge of despair; how sweet and reviving are the fellowship and services of one who has trodden these paths of sorrow and darkness before us; who has gone to the grave to weep—been led forth into the wilderness to endure a season of fiery temptation, and been crushed to the earth, in the garden of agony, by the weight of his sins reckoned against him, and by the anger of God, kindled anew in the conscience, and speaking out, in every groan of wrestling nature! O, how the tried and anguished heart clings to such a friend, though he be but human! There is a community of feeling, a warmth and fullness of sympathy, which is as balm to the wounded spirit.

Jesus Christ has taken upon Him our actual sufferings. He has endured the very evils from which he came to deliver us. The human ill cannot be named which he did not experience, nor the scene of humiliation and deprivation, and trial and agony, through which He did not pass in His earthly career. All that we have felt of the evil of sin, the guilt and misery of our condition, the justice of God in the punishment of transgression, the enmity of the world, the power of the devil, and the pains of death, He has felt. The measure of His *privation* was the measure of God's own fullness—the measure of His *endurance* the measure of our ill-desert and of God's wrath against sin. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich!" His baptism was one of suffering. From the "manger" that cradled Him, to the "tomb" in which His body was laid, poverty and neglect, and sorrow and suffering, attended Him. Are you poor? What had He whose blessing had enriched the universe? "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." Is your lot cast among the poor and obscure? He was "the carpenter's son," and wrought at an humble trade. Are you neglected and despised by the rich and great? His associates were the fishermen of Galilee, and the spurned publicans and sinners of His nation. Are afflictions your lot? He was, above all others, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Are you assailed by temptation? How was He tried! What a conflict He had in the wilderness, where alone and for forty days, He withstood the terrible onset of the prince of evil. And what language can convey an adequate conception of the conflict of the Garden, in the intensity of its suffering? "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." "O, my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." "And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground." That was sorrow indeed—the hour and power of darkness. All our conflicts with the powers of darkness are as nothing compared with the agony of that hour.

And yet He endured. He was "without sin." No guile was found in Him. He was "made perfect through sufferings." Clothed in human nature, and bearing its infirmities and sufferings, He passed through this world of sin, "holy, harmless, and undefiled," and entered heaven with the spoils of a mighty victory, the Conqueror of sin, and death, and hell, the Head of a new kingdom, and the accepted, and every way qualified, Intercessor of His people. The remembrance of Christ's sufferings, serves to sweeten the cup of our earthly sorrows—endears His grace and office-work to us—and encourages hope and confidence in Him as our Forerunner and Advocate.

V. FINALLY, he is a friend, indeed, *whose regard for us is*

equalled only by his ability to extend relief. Now Christ's sympathy is as effective as it is real, as strong as it is kind. He can succor the tempted—relieve the distressed—guide the erring—defend the weak—supply the needy—restore the fallen—and save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him. He has infinite resources of wisdom, power, and grace, and can, therefore, accomplish the full salvation of every believing soul, and consummate, in glory unending and perfect, the stupendous work of redeeming love. His is not the pity of *weakness*, unable to befriend us in our low estate, or afraid to breast the mighty tide of ruin which is sweeping an accursed race to hell, but the pity of *Omnipotence*, with its heart of courage and arm of strength. His are not the tears and pleadings of despair, wept over hopeless beings and poured upon the ear of unrelenting and unsatisfied Justice, but the tears of a wrought-out deliverance, shed over sinners already ransomed—tears of joy in the prospect of their salvation ; the pleadings of infinite merit, of an accepted righteousness, before a Throne, appeased by the shedding of blood, disarmed of its thunders and made more attractive and glorious than ever, by the spirit of forgiveness which it breathes towards sinners, for the sake of our great High Priest. The feelings of manhood and the resources of the God-head, equally belong to Christ. The one qualifies Him to sympathize with us and prompts to benevolent action for our relief, while the other bears Him out in the work and ensures the victory. O, what a Friend and Saviour ! What a heart has Jesus to feel, what an arm to deliver ! In His active sympathy and love toward man, as a lost creature of God, whom He came to seek and to restore, there are the elements of a blessed consolation, a divine strength, an overcoming faith. The ties which bind the penitent and believing sinner to the heart of Jesus and the throne of God, are not a vain thing. There is a voice heard from Calvary, louder than the cry of human guilt, louder even than the thunders of Divine wrath, and sweeter and more majestic than the united harmony of heaven : it is the voice of Incarnate Mercy, groaning out its life for sinners, and pleading with God—by its own matchless worth and dignity—by its life of obedience and toil—by its bloody sweat and final agony, to stay the avenging hand, and spare the guilty, and save the lost.

With Jesus Christ for our advocate on high, our cause cannot fail. His own dignity and worth, and the value of His sacrifice, will give amazing weight to His intercessions. Under the power of His pleadings, Justice will sheathe the avenging sword. Presented by such a Mediator, and perfumed by a merit surpassing all creature imperfection and guilt, our poor services will find favor with God ; and the Holy Spirit, the blessed Comforter, will descend and dwell in our hearts, and seal us unto the day of redemption.